CHAPTER 9

MEASURING VIOLENCE, ERASING STRUGGLES: HERMENEUTICAL INJUSTICE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESEARCH

Preethi Krishnan

Domestic violence is the manifestation of gender and power within intimate and family relationships. How women make sense of their experience of violence may be influenced by the presence or absence of collective hermeneutical resources. In spaces where feminist interpretive resources are not available, women's authentic experiences tend to be erased, misunderstood, and misrepresented even in institutions that are meant to protect them. This chapter critically examines one such institution – survey research. While surveys show the extent of a social problem, it is essential to examine whether surveys highlight or erase the various ways in which women struggle with violence. This leads to the questions: What hermeneutical resources do women have to make sense of their experience of violence? How do surveys erase or enhance collective understanding of women's experience of violence? This chapter juxtaposes the findings about women's attitudes toward domestic violence as measured by the Tamil Nadu National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2016 with ethnographic data gathered from rural Tamil Nadu, India. In the survey, more than 70% of the women justified domestic violence against women. In contrast, analysis of ethnographic data revealed that women rarely justified violence but rather struggled with violence in three ways – subverting violence, calibrating violence, and collaborating against violence. Where there were organizing structures, such as a union, women resorted to collaborative action. Thus, surveys

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that measure women's attitudes toward domestic violence as static mind-sets erase how consciousness is an outcome of political organizing that provides marginalized groups with liberational interpretive resources.

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Domestic violence is the manifestation of gender and power within the family and intimate relationships (Abraham, 2005; Anderson, 2010; E.R. Dobash & R. Dobash, 1979; Krishnan & Subramaniam, 2015; Subramaniam & Krishnan, 2016; Yllo, 1993). How women interpret their own experience of violence and how their experience of violence is understood collectively may influence how issues of violence are addressed. Whether people recognize violence as an aberration in an otherwise natural gender system that assigns specific roles to women and men or adopt a feminist consciousness that challenges the gender system may have implications for social change (Gerson & Peiss, 1985). How women make sense of their experience of violence may be influenced by the presence or absence of the collective interpretive resources that scholars refer to as hermeneutical resources (Fricker, 2007). In spaces where feminist interpretive resources are not available for public consumption, women's authentic experiences tend to be erased, misunderstood, and misrepresented. In the past, the feminist movement has utilized consciousness-raising meetings to enhance collective understanding of violence through a feminist lens (Kelland, 2016).

In making the personal political, consciousness-raising spaces not only made violence visible but also became one of the foundational strategies of feminist organizing ("Trying to make…" 2017). Because of how their experiences were listened to, interpreted, and examined, the consciousness-raising process itself enhanced the hermeneutical resources available for organizing (Kelland, 2016). Even though early formats of consciousness-raising processes were criticized for not including intersectional perspectives, Black women have sought to reform consciousness-raising processes to make them more expansive and communal ("Trying to make…", 2017). Grassroots women's movements in India have used similar processes to organize women in rural areas (Batliwala, 2015). In making women's experiences visible, consciousness-raising groups strengthened interpretive resources that enhanced the collective understanding of women's experiences of violence. The local and subjective nature of the consciousness-raising process can be contrasted with the breadth and objective nature of survey findings.

Naming a phenomenon, defining it, and measuring it can make a social problem visible. While consciousness-raising groups enabled women to label phenomena that didn't have a name – such as sexual harassment and domestic violence – surveys may help measure the extent of the problem. However, it is critical to examine whether surveys contribute to developing collective consciousness and agency or if they erase the various ways in which women struggle with violence.

Such an examination is especially necessary in cases where women do not have access to consciousness-raising groups, and surveys are the only interpretive resource available to understand women's experiences. This leads me to the questions: What hermeneutical resources do women have to make sense of their experience of violence? How do surveys erase or enhance our collective understanding of women's experience of violence?

To answer these questions, I contrast the findings about women's attitudes toward domestic violence as measured by the Tamil Nadu National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2016 with ethnographic data I gathered from rural Tamil Nadu between June to October 2016. The NFHS is a large multi-round survey conducted in a representative sample of households throughout India. The 2015–2016 survey is the fourth round of the NFHS. As a multi-round survey that collects data on health and welfare, the NFHS provides insights about changing trends in health issues. This chapter critically examines a question in NFHS 2016 regarding attitudes towards domestic violence where women are asked if "it is justifiable for a husband to beat his wife under any of the seven pre-defined circumstances." The survey found that in Tamil Nadu, "seventy percent of women believe it is justifiable for a husband to beat his wife under some circumstances."(International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF, 2017:27) These findings contrast drastically with Tamil Nadu's relatively high performance in gender indicators such as women's literacy, maternal mortality rate, and political participation. That women themselves justified domestic violence suggests a deep state of disempowerment among Tamil women. In this chapter, I identify three ways in which women responded to domestic violence to demonstrate how the nuances of women's struggle with violence may have been erased through such questions. These responses show how measuring attitudes as a static phenomenon erases the possibilities of developing interpretive resources that help develop a feminist understanding of violence.

This chapter is part of a larger study that examined women's entitlements for childcare and food from the state. Data for this chapter are based on ethnographic observations and interviews with 50 childcare workers, mothers, childcare union leaders, and state representatives. Even though domestic violence was not the primary topic of my research, women's experience with violence often emerged in my data. I juxtapose the survey finding with three themes that emerged in women's discourse about domestic violence – *subverting* violence, *calibrating* violence, and *collaborating* against violence. I demonstrate these three themes through the experiences of four women. Sarada, who used humor to subversively interpret violence. In her jokes about domestic violence, Sarada identifies gender relations as significant to the prevalence of violence. Mohana, critically calibrated her experience of violence even as the discourse in her family gaslighted her experience by framing violence as her husband's demonstration of love (Sweet, 2020). In engaging in an unprompted conversation with me, Mohana sought affirmation for her own understanding of violence as oppressive. Finally, women like Sindhu and Janaki, who had access to a collective or support system through the childcare union, sought support and collaboration to address the violent situation they were faced with.

These findings must be seen in the light of global trends that seek to render invisible women's agency while upholding unrealistic standards regarding victimhood (Stark, 2007). Unlike the suggestion in the survey, in my observations at the fieldsite, women rarely "justified" domestic violence. Rather, their response to violence is embedded in a gender structure. Where there were supportive institutional resources, such as the union, women resorted to collaborative action. When isolated, women sought out individual ways of coping with violence. Thus, women's agency and feminist consciousness may find varied manifestations under an oppressive gender structure, even as they continue to struggle under it.

FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AND HERMENEUTICAL INJUSTICE

Feminist movements around the world have demanded policy reforms to address the issue of violence against women. Globally, 30% of women experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime (World Health Organization, n.d.). Domestic violence can include intimate partner violence as well as violence imposed by extended family members (Krishnan & Subramaniam, 2015). Domestic violence can take the form of physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. The emphasis on physical violence, while important, may render invisible the coercive nature of emotional abuse (Stark, 2007). Further, perpetrators may also gaslight victims by using gender stereotypes to make them feel "crazy" about their own experiences of violence (Sweet, 2019). Given the emotional nature of domestic violence, the role of consciousness-raising has been very critical in feminist movements.

Consciousness-raising groups help raise feminist consciousness among movement participants. Gender consciousness can be seen in a spectrum – gender awareness, female consciousness, and feminist consciousness. Gender awareness refers to a "non-critical description of the existing system of gender relations whereby people accept the current social definitions of gender as natural and inevitable" (Gerson & Peiss, 1985:324). Female consciousness also accepts existing gender roles but at the same time recognizes the rights and obligations associated with being a man or a woman. Feminist consciousness is a "highly articulated challenge to or defense of the system of gender relations in the form of an ideology, as well as a shared group identity and a growing politicization resulting in a social movement" (Gerson and Peiss,1985: 326). In consciousness-raising groups, women made their "personal" issues "political" by sharing the seemingly mundane aspects of their daily lives and in the process making the often-invisible abuse, visible (Reger, 2012). In doing so, they developed the shared group identity of being women, recognizing that their shared marginalization was due to gender.

Outside such spaces, the invisibility of women's experiences was detrimental to collective understanding of issues of violence, which in turn impacted how women sought redress when faced with violence. Scholars term this disadvantage as hermeneutical injustice. Hermeneutical injustice refers to the "injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective

hermeneutical resource" (Fricker, 2007:155). Thus, those disadvantaged by power structures of gender, race, class, and caste are often further disadvantaged when mainstream vocabulary and language are designed to privilege the experiences of the dominant groups. The gap in hermeneutical resources disadvantages those who have been at the receiving end of domestic violence.

In particular, those seeking redress from violence through the legal system have long struggled with providing adequate evidence for a crime that occurs in the privacy of the home. Women are often blamed for being inconsistent with their testimonies even as they struggle with the varied emotions they may feel about the situation, including fear of further harm from their abuser (Stark, 2007). What is not considered is that such "inconsistencies" may be due to the gap in collective hermeneutical resources that enable shared understanding of a situation especially between individuals who occupy different structural positions (Fricker, 2007). Thus, the gap in hermeneutical resources contributes to further erasure of violence against women, people from LGBT communities, and gender non-conforming people. Although the gap in hermeneutical resources is caused by structural inequalities, the intentional design of processes may help reduce the gap. The role of the listener is significant in this case. If "the hearer exercises a reflexive critical sensitivity to any reduced intelligibility incurred by the speaker owing to a gap in collective hermeneutical resources," survivors of violence may be in a better position to both make sense of their experience and share it (Fricker, 2007: 7). Institutions mostly do the opposite.

Even in situations where the legal system seeks to "protect" the victim, institutions rely on restrictive definitions of what it means to be a victim. Helplessness and purity came to be seen as identifiers for the ideal victim. Women who seem angry or aggressive may face discrimination from the legal system (Bumiller, 2008; Minow, 1992; Scheppele, 1992). In India, protectionist domestic violence laws are interpreted in ways that discriminate against women who do not conform to gendered norms of "modesty," "virtue," and ideals of monogamy (Agnes, 2011; Agnes, 1999). However, where women are organized or have access to organizations, they use legal rights to negotiate collectively for their rights such as seeking compensation or custody (Roychowdhury, 2021). Victim-blaming narratives can also be seen in the United States where the non-profit system's dependence for funding on mainstream institutions has led to an increasing focus on protective aspects of shelters rather than on the development of a militant feminist consciousness that challenges traditional gender relations (Stark, 2007). Thus, where women are not organized, those who demonstrate agency are erased as victims, or rather women are expected to erase their agency to be acknowledged as victims.

Such erasure of agency and the limited collective understanding of violence has been upheld by structures of power embedded in socio-legal institutions. The gender ideology of institutions such as the legal system and the shelter systems influence the hermeneutical resources available for women to share their experience of violence and for the public to develop a collective understanding of violence. Yet another institution that influences hermeneutical resources is research. How research frames, measures, and describes issues of violence and agency may

influence the collective understanding of women's struggles with violence. For example, when measuring sexual violence, fewer victims report that they have been raped as compared to when they are asked if they have experienced specific actions that are included under the definition of rape (Khan, Greene, Mellins, & Hirsch, 2020). Such differences are not because of varied experiences but because the public understanding of rape is restrictive and non-inclusive of the many types of violations that victims experience.

Similarly, whether the researcher exhibits "critical sensitivity" will influence how women share their complicated emotions about domestic violence. In this paper, I critically evaluate how some survey questions obscure women's experience of violence and agency. I argue that the seemingly objective measurement of women's attitude toward domestic violence has inadvertently erased women's agency and struggle with violence. Further, how women interpret their social experiences is not removed from social structures that influence their feminist consciousness. When survey questions decontextualize women's consciousness from movements and organizing, it implies that women's attitudes are static phenomena rather than the outcome of political organizing.

CONTEXT: GENDER RELATIONS IN TAMIL NADU

Tamil Nadu is one of 29 states in India. Tamil Nadu has relatively better indicators in terms of human development among all Indian states. Tamil Nadu ranks among the top five states in indicators such as infant mortality rate, proportion of underweight and stunted children, and children's immunization rates (Sinha, 2016). Women's literacy rate in Tamil Nadu (73.86%) is also comparably higher than the national average of 65.46%. That said, Tamil Nadu can also be seen as a paradox in terms of human development, especially with respect to gender. For example, in spite of the relatively better women's literacy rates, the decreasing sex ratio at birth (from 905 in 2011 to 834 in 2014) tells a cautionary tale. Sex ratio at birth refers to the proportion of girls born for every 1000 boys. If there is no intervention, sex ratio at birth tends to be around 945. That the sex ratio at birth in 2014 is 834 suggests that there may have been human intervention, such as female feticide. The human development indicators in Tamil Nadu demonstrate the complexities of examining gender relations through statistics alone. We must examine the National Family Health Survey 2016 survey findings about domestic violence in this context.

This chapter focuses on a question in NFHS 2016 regarding attitudes towards domestic violence where women are asked if they agree that "a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife" under any of the seven pre-defined circumstances. The seven pre-defined circumstances include 1) she goes out without telling him (54.5%), 2) she neglects the house or children (57.4%), 3) she argues with him (46.2%), 4) she refuses to have sexual intercourse with him (19.4%), 5) she doesn't cook properly (31.3%), 6) he suspects her of being unfaithful (22.4%), and 7) she shows disrespect for in-laws (40.1%). The number in parenthesis is the proportion of women who agreed that it is justifiable for the husband to beat his wife for that

reason. Although there were variations in the proportion of women who agreed across various reasons, the survey found that in Tamil Nadu, 72.5% of the women agreed that it is justifiable for a husband to hit or beat his wife for at least one specified reason. Such a high proportion of women agreeing with the statement that it was justifiable for a husband to engage in violence is shocking by itself. But that this was a finding in the state of Tamil Nadu, given the state's relatively high performance in gender indicators was especially disturbing. Further, Tamil Nadu has a long history of political mobilization and a vibrant social movement culture in the state. In contrast, the survey results offer a very different picture about the state of Tamil women's empowerment.

Without undermining the finding itself, in this chapter, I offer three types of responses from women to domestic violence which contradict the survey findings. This chapter does not attempt to invalidate the finding itself. Rather, the effort is to contextualize women's attitudes toward violence in social structures. In cases where women were organized in a collective or had the opportunity to talk through their experiences with a listener who showed reflexive critical sensitivity, they evaluated violence in a very different way. Thus, women's attitudes towards domestic violence should not be seen as static mind-sets but rather as malleable phenomena influenced by the absence or presence of interpretive resources.

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this study are drawn from an ethnographic study that I conducted in rural Tamil Nadu from June 2016 to October 2016. For this study, I interviewed 50 childcare workers, mothers, state representatives, union leaders, and conducted observations in childcare centers. Childcare centers or *anganwadis*, as they are known in Tamil, are part of a large welfare program known as the Integrated Child Development Services. Although I conducted in-depth observations at two *anganwadis*, I visited more than 14 *anganwadis* to conduct interviews, allowing me to see variations in infrastructure across centers, the caste demographics of the local area, and the grievances that are general and specific to those *anganwadis*. Given the demographics of my population, most women were working-class and from non-brahmin caste communities. Although it was not my primary interest, women often spoke about violence and some of these themes had begun to emerge as I wrote regular memos during my field work. Data for this paper are primarily from observations, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured conversations. While mothers and child-care workers spoke about their own struggles with violence, union leaders often brought up domestic violence as one of the many issues that they engage with as the union. I was also able to observe women dealing with issues of violence in union meetings. All conversations were held in Tamil which I translated to English. In this chapter, I present responses from four women as they struggled with violence in their lives or that of their comrades. All names used in this chapter are pseudonyms. My intention in this chapter is not to generalize, but rather to demonstrate the various ways in which women responded to violence, particularly in contrast to the survey findings. Singular

cases in qualitative research can rarely claim to be representative of the population given the various factors that are unique to the case (Small, 2009). But the four women I present here are not outliers either.

FINDINGS

The National Family Health Survey finding that more than 70% Tamil women agreed that it was justifiable for men to hit or beat them suggests a deep sense of disempowerment and absence of feminist consciousness among Tamil women. In this section, I present three ways in which women responded to domestic violence as illustrated by four vignettes of women whose struggles with violence were very different from the survey findings. Rather than justifying men's violence against them, I find that women were more likely to *subvert* violence, *calibrate* violence, or *collaborate* against violence. These themes show how women share their experience of violence when they are organized or when they are in the presence of listeners who demonstrate reflexive critical sensitivity as opposed to an objective listener as exemplified by a survey. Thus, the organizing structures influenced the hermeneutical resources available to women as they made sense of and shared their experiences of violence.

Subverting Violence

One of the ways in which women coped with violence was to use humor. As I will demonstrate, they did not use humor to justify violence but rather to be subversive about the gender relations that defined their marital life. Of the 14 *anganwadis* that I visited, I built rapport with workers at two centers where I conducted in-depth observations. While waiting at one of the centers, a couple of mothers came by in the afternoon to hang out at the *anganwadi*. Their children were sleeping, and they spent the time chatting with the childcare workers and other mothers. Having not seen me around before, Sarada, one of the mothers was inquisitive about my presence at the center. I introduced myself and told her about my research on *anganwadis*. As was a typical practice in the area, Sarada was quick to ask about my marital status. When I informed her that I was not married, she responded jokingly:

> *Why don't you marry? Why only I should suffer? Why don't you marry so that you can also suffer the same way?* [Field Notes]

This joke was interesting because I had heard men joke about marriage often implying that their marriage and their wives in particular constrained them. I have always found such jokes from men interesting (and a mis-representation) in a context where it was usually women who moved into their husband's home and experienced violence and control (Krishnan & Subramaniam, 2015). As I wondered if her joke was a generic narrative about marriage, she continued.

> *You know what I want? In my next life, I want to be reborn as my husband's husband, so that I can beat him up after consuming a bottle of alcohol.* [Field Notes]

As crude as this joke sounds, it is very clear that Sarada was not justifying domestic violence. Though she does not challenge gender relations, her joke does not imply that she thinks domestic violence is justifiable. As a woman who does not have access to organized spaces where women come together to challenge violence, Sarada opts for a rhetorical device. In the spectrum of gender consciousness, Sarada's demonstration of a female consciousness is one in which she recognizes that her experience of violence is related to her identity as a woman. While the lack of an organizing space prevents her from developing a shared group identity with other women to challenge the gender system as an ideology, at no point, does Sarada justify the violence directed against her. I argue that in using humor to suggest that her husband deserved to be beaten is her attempt at verbally subverting violence, even as she may have felt constrained in action. While Sarada did not have access to a feminist organizing space, the *anganwadi* itself was a space where women gathered. Though the space was not designed to develop feminist consciousness, it nevertheless offered Saradha some hermeneutical resources – women listeners who understood and were sympathetic to her life situation.

Calibrating Violence

Another way in which women struggled with violence is through calibrating their own experience through conversations. As Fricker (2007) argues, the role of the listener is essential in this case. I met Mohana while traveling in public transportation during my fieldwork. The bus was not crowded and I found a place to sit next to Mohana. It was common in that area for people to strike up conversations with strangers. Even though I am a Tamil person myself, people could easily figure out that I was an outsider. Therefore, people were always curious why I was there. From my side, I always encouraged such conversations because it helped me understand the community better.

Typically, our conversations would revolve around our hometowns, our families, and about the area itself. However, my conversation with Mohana moved in a different direction. When I asked her about her family, Mohana pointed to the group of women sitting three or four seats in front of us. I was surprised that Mohana was sitting separately from them. She told me that she was sitting separately because she wanted to get some air coming in through the window. Her husband was also on the same bus but was sitting behind in the men's section.

Mohana told me that her husband was always suspicious of whether she would cheat on him. She told me that he would beat her whenever he felt suspicious. With the calmness that betrayed the intensity of the experience, Mohana showed me a cigarette burn scar on her arm, which she said her husband had inflicted upon her. Given that her family members were sitting close by, neither of us showed any heightened emotion. Then Mohana said,

> *I don't think this is right but my family tells me that he does this because he loves me. Is this how love works?*"
>
> I responded, *No, this is not how love works. What you are feeling is what anyone would feel. This is not how love should be*. [Field notes]

We went silent, fully aware that neither of us could do anything to change the situation, but having developed a shared understanding of her experience of violence.

Not only was Mohana experiencing physical and emotional violence, but she was also being gaslighted by her husband and family. Gaslighting is when "perpetrators mobilize gender-based stereotypes and structural and institutional inequalities against victims to manipulate their realities" (Sweet, 2019: 851). In violent situations, women recognize and sense the injustice done to them. Yet, perpetrators often create a surreal social environment in a way that makes victims feel "crazy" for feeling the way they do. In this case, Mohana sensed that her husband's actions were unjust even though her family members were undermining her feelings by creating the myth of a husband who loves her. Unlike in the west, intimate partner violence in India is located in an extended family context where multiple people are engaged in creating a shared reality for the woman (Krishnan & Subramaniam, 2015).

When Mohana shared her story with me, a stranger she met on the bus, she was looking for an empathetic listener who would help her calibrate her feelings outside of the context that she was living in. Without access to an organizational set-up, Mohana could not have calibrated her feelings to challenge the gaslighting that she was experiencing. While Mohana did not justify the violence against her, she had to "try" speaking her authentic feelings to a stranger. In that conversation, I did not sense any justification of domestic violence. Rather, I was watching a woman slowly testing the trustworthiness of the listener. Even though she gave some thought to the patriarchal notion of a violent but loving husband, she had not accepted it. She needed a reflexively critical listener to try out her interpretation of her own experience, an opportunity that was rarely available to her.

I refer to this phenomenon as *calibration*, a process whereby people who occupy marginalized positions try out interpretations of their experiences which feel authentic but are unavailable to them due to hermeneutical marginalization (Fricker, 2007). Calibration then is a process that might result in a dance between two seemingly opposite positions. At one end is the oppressive interpretive space where their experiences are interpreted through the language of the dominant group. At the other end is the liberational interpretive space where the experiences of marginalized people are validated. I argue that marginalized people who may not have access to organizing spaces may go through such a calibrating phase as they travel from an oppressive interpretive world to a liberational one. Such a nuanced process can seldom be measured through a survey. Mohana's calibration of violence would be rendered invisible by a survey question or it could be seen as a justification of violence.

Collaborating Against Violence

As I spent a lot of time with childcare workers, the most common pattern that emerged among them regarding domestic violence is *collaborating* against violence. Even though the main objective of the childcare workers union was

workplace rights, workers would tell me that the union also intervened when there were "family issues." In this section, I show two such interventions – material and emotional – where union leaders intervened to help workers navigate their struggle with violence.

Kanakavalli is a senior teacher who is a prominent leader in the childcare workers' union. When I asked her about her role as a union leader, one of the instances that she shared was about helping a member navigate violence. Sindhu is a childcare worker who had borrowed a gold necklace from another worker, Savithri. With Savithri's permission, Sindhu pawned the necklace for a loan. When Savithri's son learned about this exchange, he began to insist that Sindhu return the necklace, especially since Savithri was about to retire. He threatened Sindhu that he would go to the police if she didn't return the necklace. Sindhu turned to Kanakavalli for help. Kanakavalli decided to request a loan for Sindhu from the office so that she could return the necklace to Savithri. However, the officer, a new employee, refused to authorize the loan because Sindhu had already taken a Rs. 50,000 loan from the office. Although it might seem like a workplace issue, Kanakavalli's interview revealed how workplace rights were connected to Sindhu's fear of domestic violence:

> *We are simply asking for our rights. The rules say that we can be given loans. People have even got Rs. 1,50,000. They could have at least given her Rs. 1,00,000. She has 23 years of service left. Fine, don't give me a loan. I have only four years left. But you can give her. If you don't do that, and if her husband gets to know, it will end up in a fight, and she will commit suicide. That's what she says, that she will kill herself. She says, "**My husband does not know. If this becomes a police case, I will get caught. I will die."** A worker will die. She has been begging for a loan from the officer for three months. It's only after that, I intervened to ask for a loan for her. I went and told the officer, "Only you can authorize the loan. Please do it for her." Sindhu keeps crying so much. The officer took so long to give her the loan.* [Interview with Kanakavalli]

Even though my question to Kanakavalli was about the union's role in ensuring worker rights, her interview demonstrates how in some instances, workplace rights are closely connected to women's experience of domestic violence. That Sindhu fears "getting caught" by her husband more than by the police shows the level of control and abuse in her marriage. Neither Sindhu nor Kanakavalli thinks that such control is justified. Rather, they collaborate to help her navigate the violence. Sindhu turns to her union leader for help in dealing with potential violence. Although Kanakavalli and Sindhu collaborate against violence, they do not challenge the threat of violence. Kanakavalli understands that at that point, Sindhu requires material support. However, collaboration may also take the form of emotional support.

Gouri was a childcare worker in an *anganwadi* that I worked with closely. Although Gouri did not have a formal title, she was very active in the union. As her house was close to the office, it often turned out to be a meeting place for many childcare workers. One evening, the childcare workers were preparing to travel to the capital city of Chennai to participate in a state rally of childcare workers. They had organized a bus to take workers to Chennai. Workers began showing up throughout the evening. Janaki was one such worker.

As soon as Janaki came to Gouri's home, she started complaining about her husband. Her husband had beaten her because she wanted to go to the rally in Chennai. She said, "*I have taken two slaps to come to the rally*." In her anger, she also called her husband a monkey. Her husband had helped her get the job at the childcare center through his network. However, when her job took precedence over home responsibilities (such as the overnight travel for the rally), he would try to control her personally and professionally. For example, Janaki was in charge of two centers these days because of a vacancy in another center. Her husband was annoyed that she was at work more than usual and expressed his displeasure to her. When I asked her what motivated her to come to the rally in spite of having to face the violence, she told me that the rally offered her the opportunity to stay away from her husband for some time.

As Janaki shared her stories with everyone, some people downplayed the situation. For example, Gouri told her, "*Everyone has these issues, Janaki. You calm down*." In response, Janaki told Gouri, "*Your husband does not live here. That is better*." Gouri's husband lived and worked in Chennai, the capital city. Other workers listened to Janaki and offered her emotional support. When Janaki shared her story with Kanakavalli, her response was different. Kanakavalli told Janaki, "*You tell him this. If you beat me again, I will beat you back. I will take this stick and beat you back*." When Janaki shared how her sons (who are adults) wondered how she suffered through the violence, Kanakavalli said, "*Your sons should stand by you and call out their father. You may not be able to beat him but they can do better."* A few things are clear in these interactions. Janaki openly shared her experience of violence with a large group of women. Even though the group itself was not formed to address violence, they offered various forms of support as she shared her story. Some offered emotional support by listening but Kanakavalli offered critical support, both validating her experience and offering her strength and power.

Kanakavalli's response to both women is not an instance of individual action, but rather the response of a union leader who is trained to respond to her people's needs. Even though the union's main objective is not related to domestic violence, in organizing women workers, they recognize violence as central to these women's lives. In both cases, the workplace offers some solace to the women experiencing violence. In the first case, the workplace offered material support through loans while in the second case, it offered critical emotional support. Even though Gouri herself downplayed the situation, she also did not justify the violence. Moreover, Gouri herself has experienced violent behavior from her husband. None of the women justified violence against women.

While they did not challenge violence in ways that might demonstrate feminist consciousness, they offered women the support they needed at the time. Unlike Mohana and Sarada, Sindhu and Janaki had access to organized women outside their family. In both cases, it is clear that workplace organizing offered women an empathetic listening space. It is through such listening that women were able to make sense of their own experience and to collaborate against violence. It is difficult to imagine that survey questions would capture the nuanced positions that women and leaders may have to take when they or their people face violence.

Their immediate response seems to make sure that women are safe, either by removing the trigger for violence or by offering a solace from violence.

CONCLUSION

This chapter highlights how organizing spaces and collectives are critical to enrich the collective understanding and visibility of the experiences of people who occupy marginalized identities. Institutional spaces, including research, often have restrictive definitions that render invisible the experiences of marginalized people. Unlike the findings of the National Family Health Survey, these women do not justify the violence against them but rather, they *subvert* it, *calibrate it*, or *collaborate* against it. Sarada subverts violence by using humor to demonstrate how the privilege of being a man and husband allows her husband to beat her. Mohana calibrates her authentic feelings about violence with a stranger even as her family gaslights her experience. Even though both Sarada and Mohana are not able to challenge gender relations in their lives, by no means do they justify the violence directed against them. In contrast, both Sindhu and Janaki, as members of the childcare union collaborate against violence, either materially, emotionally, or both. While there are consciousness raising-spaces that are specifically designed for women to engage with their experience of violence, merely having access to an organized space enabled women to collaborate against violence. These four women demonstrate how the presence and absence of hermeneutical resources are critical to how members of marginalized communities make sense of their own experiences and how their layered experiences are invisible to the public. What lessons do these four women offer us in terms of hermeneutical injustice?

Hermeneutical injustice refers to how "one's social experience is obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource" (Fricker, 2007:155). Fricker's definition offers us the lens to think of how people who occupy marginalized identities may struggle with making sense of their own experiences when they do not have hermeneutical resources that enable that process. However, the variations in how these four women struggled with violence show how their interpretation of their experience depended on the social structures under which they live. Whether they subvert, calibrate, or collaborate against violence depended on what organizing structures surround them.

Prejudices in collective hermeneutical resources impact how marginalized people make sense of their experience (Fricker, 2007). In particular, the experiences of marginalized people are obscured to themselves and to the public. In this chapter, I show how different contexts enrich hermeneutical resources available to women. Whether women subvert, calibrate, or collaborate against violence may be impacted by whether they have access to safe spaces, reflexive listeners, and organized spaces. Sarada had a safe space to hang out with other women in the childcare center where she resorted to humor to present her situation of violence. In doing so, she made visible the violence she faces without necessarily rocking

the boat. She has no doubt that her husband's actions are reproachable. Yet, she resigns herself to a life of violence. Her only hope of retribution is in her next life, according to her joke. The safe space of women offers her access to hermeneutical resources as everyone in the room understands and enjoys the joke about her husband. Mohana, too, is aware that the violence that her husband inflicts upon her is unjust. However, her evaluation of the situation is in conflict with that of her family members. In speaking to me, an outsider, Mohana was seeking out a reflexive critical listener who can validate her experience. In seeking out a listener, Mohana was able to access hermeneutical resources that were otherwise unavailable to her. In doing so, she was able to challenge her family's deliberate erasure of her authentic experience. However, similar to Sarada, Mohana is also not able to challenge gender relations at the moment.

Finally, Sindhu and Janaki were the most articulate on how they experienced violence and actively sought out help – material and emotional – to navigate the situation. In particular, these women actively collaborated with other workers to address the violent situation. That they were members of a childcare workers' union that was formed to fight for their rights was essential in this regard. A structured organized space provided these women the hermeneutical resources both to make sense of their experience and to seek help. Thus, the presence of an organized space is critical for women to make their experience of violence public.

Overall, the experiences of these four women show that "women's attitudes towards domestic violence" is not a static phenomenon best measured using a survey. In the survey, women are asked whether they justify a husband beating them for any of seven reasons. Such a question with pre-determined answers erases the dialectics of how attitudes are formed and manifested. People's attitudes toward their life situation are influenced by the conditions in which they find themselves. When people find themselves in situations where they have access to hermeneutical resources that help them make sense of their experience, they are able to elaborate on their authentic feelings about their experience of violence. In the absence of hermeneutical resources that support their thoughts, women may either not share their experiences and/or their experiences may be erased. While the survey findings are important, decontextualized findings may erase the various ways in which women struggle with violence and the conditions under which they are able to subvert, calibrate, and collaborate against violence in their lives.

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